

Kerista

in a Nutshell



*A Short Introduction to the Kerista
Commune of San Francisco*

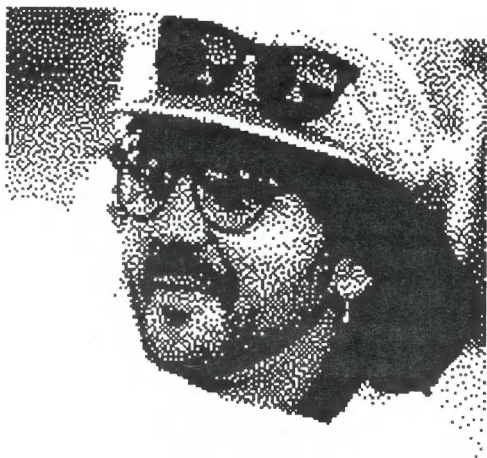
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he Kerista Commune of San Francisco (also known as Kerista and the Kerista Tribe) has been in existence since 1971. It was a natural extension of the hippie idealism and human potential/sensitivity group experiments of that era. The community began as an attempt to create a viable alternative to traditional, socially fragmented lifestyles and cultural conditions. Today, Kerista consists of 28 adults, raising three children, living together in six houses in the Haight-Ashbury. Keristans operate a successful, full-service computer company, publish two Bay Area free newspapers (*RockHEAD* and *The Node*), work on assorted creative projects and R&D connected to improving the quality of life on earth, and are generally trying to get through life as pleasantly as possible.



Economic and Social Equality

In some ways, Kerista is similar to the Israeli kibbutz model of intentional community, which has served as an inspiration to its members. For instance, Kerista operates democratically. Policies and decisions are made through a voting process, with each member having an equal vote. All members practice economic sharing, enjoy the same standard of living and have the same rights and privileges. Keristan culture is nonsexist, nonracist, and nonageist.



Home and Family Life

In other ways, however, Kerista diverges from the kibbutz model. The kibbutzniks place a high value on having and raising many kids; Keristans have taken a vow of voluntary childlessness (i.e., a decision not to reproduce and to only raise kids already born). Kibbutz life is based on marriage and the nuclear family. Keristans stay single and practice polyfidelity, a sexual/lifestyle choice in which people live in households with multiple best friends and are nonpreferentially nonmonogamous and fidelitous within those clusters. Polyfidelity combines the trust, fidelity, and depth of intimacy found in good monogamous relationships with the excitement, variety and stimulation found in open lifestyles...in many respects, the best of both worlds. Within Kerista there are currently four separate polyfidelitous groups ranging in size from 2 (just starting out) to 14. Each group or "B-FIC" (Best Friend Identity Cluster) is open to more members who fit in with their unique "flair."

Conflict Resolution & Personal Growth

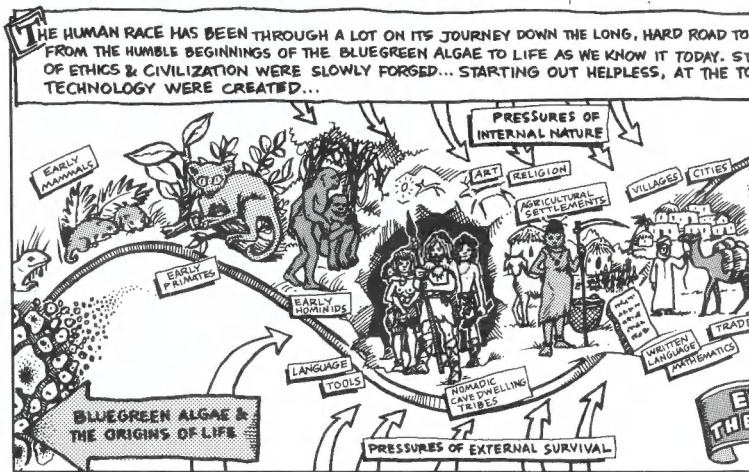
One problem perceived by some kibbutzniks is the absence in their communities of any specific personal growth or interpersonal communications process. In Kerista these things have been highly developed. Over the years the Keristans have worked out a process (dubbed "Gestalt-O-Rama" in the early '70s) in which personal accountability, rationality, high levels of verballity and conversational confrontation of contradictions are used to promote interpersonal dialogue and individual character development. The process can be very intense on occasion, but is, at the same time, one of the main reasons the commune has survived and prospered. Trial-and-error, study, observation and intelligent analysis of interpersonal, psychological dynamics and human nature has been crystallized by Keristans into the new school of utopian psychology, which has its own theories and models of human nature. It has always been a basic premise of Keristans that if people could get their relationships and psychology in order, everything else would come easy. Easier, at least.





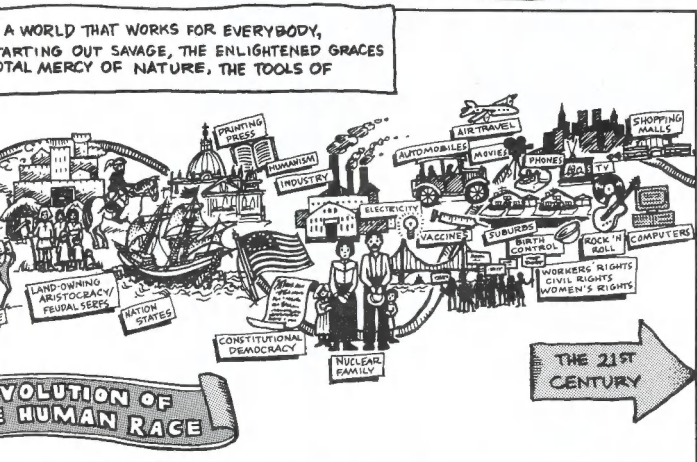
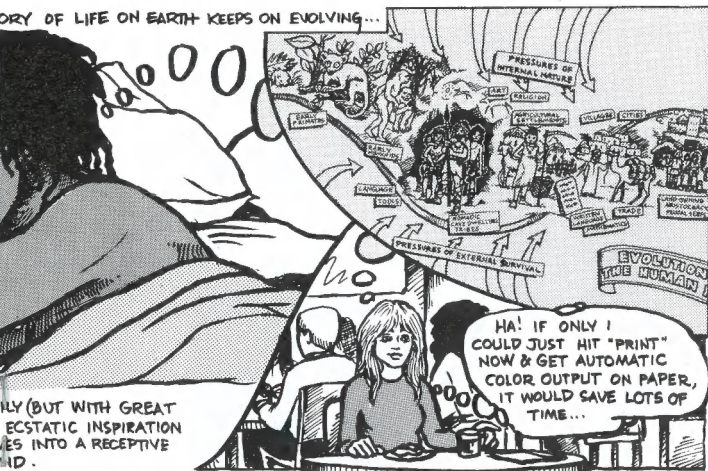
Spirituality, Religion, Mythology

Keristans are spiritually inclined, and have designed and created their own new, feminist religion. The religion is non-dogmatic, incorporating an eclectic assortment of mystical and philosophical perspectives, along with a rational, positive view of evolution, into its belief system. There are a few basic beliefs and premises in the Keristan religious system shared by all Keristans. Many more such matters are left to individual, subjective discretion. Keristans have also invented an original mythology featuring a comic strip black goddess, Sister Kerista, who symbolizes



Sister Kerista (the Goddess) dreams about the evolution towards paradise on Earth, in this excerpt from FarOut West comics by Keristan artist Even Eve. This comic strip chronicles the life (mundane, mystical and fantasy) of a utopian commune remarkably similar to Kerista. Eve has been producing the strip since 1973.

the values of humor, equality, liberation, love and the struggle against retrograde, anti-hedonistic, negative forces in the world. The religion is designed to be emotionally gratifying and fun; Keristans theatrically consider themselves to be "fun nuns and punk monks ."



Social Contract

Keristans live by a social contract, a list of standards and beliefs (both written and unwritten) that all members study prior to joining. No one becomes a member who is not in agreement and comfortable with the points of the social contract. This underlying foundation of consensus makes for relatively smooth sailing through the twists and turns of day-to-day existence. The social contract is changeable by vote of the members. Many points have been changed over time due to the evolution of the group's awareness through experience and feedback from both within and without the community.



Future Vision

Another key element in Keristan culture is the shared future vision. Community members have been developing a comprehensive, long-range scenario for positive global change. The strategy includes the development of planned communities, a business-driven peace corps funded through corporate and individual philanthropy, art, advertising, education and other innovations that trace back to the voluntary, grassroots efforts of socially responsible individuals. It also includes a whole array of artistic projects which paint pictures and scenarios of life in a high-tech, neotribal paradise. Having a larger idealistic and creative orientation, beyond just getting by in life, has been another cohesive, unifying part of the Keristan "trip."

Work

In the 1970s, Keristans supported themselves primarily through publishing a newspaper, and through a house-cleaning and gardening business. In 1979, the house-cleaning and gardening business was incorporated as Abacus, Inc. In the 1980s, the company acquired its first computer. By the end of the decade, Abacus had dropped its old lines of work, and had become a full-service computer vendor, selling personal computers (hardware and software), computer training, repairs, programming, animation, graphics and a variety of other services. Today most Keristans work for Abacus, as do about 80 other non-Keristan employees. Among other future plans for the company, Keristans envision developing the Abacus Global Village. This will be a housing complex that comes complete with a variety of personal services, facilities and benefits. People within the Global Village network would



live in planned communities of different types, tailored to a variety of psychographic values and lifestyle choices.

The Psychosocial Frontier

Kerista is a way of life that works for some people and doesn't work for others. Though there are people from a wide variety of backgrounds and personality types within Kerista, they all share certain similar values. Among these are a love of hanging out with friends as a daily experience, appreciation of the intellectual stimulation of being on a "psychosocial frontier" and an ability to give and get personal feedback on a non-superficial basis. Although the commune has been around for over 20 years, it is still a new lifestyle in many ways; the culture sculpture is still evolving. Issues such as shared leadership, the finer points of egalitarian relationships, art in a neotribal context, how to blend reality and ideals, and how to design a planned communities network continue to pose challenges that keep things lively.



Breaking the Ice

Keristans operate an ongoing "Growth Co-op" which sponsors rap groups (not the musical kind) open to the public four nights a week. These are open for people interested in learning more about the commune as well as for folks who, while not interested in living communally themselves, appreciate the benefits of the Gestalt-O-Rama process and the potential for non-vapid, intentional friendship development and values clarification to be found there. They also sponsor periodic potluck gatherings in Golden Gate Park for an extended circle of several hundred friends and relatives, also open to newcomers who are sympathetic with the microculture and values of the community.



Individuals at a turning point in life, looking for a new way to achieve satisfaction and fulfillment through group living, are invited to check out Kerista through reading more about it, correspondence and face-to-face socializing at the Growth Co-op and other informal meetings. Growth Co-op meetings take place every Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Sunday at 8 pm, at 543 Frederick Street in San Francisco (near Stanyan Street).

Additional information about Kerista available:

- *The 88 Basic Standards* (social contract points of Kerista Commune and of the Gestalt-O-Rama Growth Co-op) in printed form. (Free)
- *The Friendship Stack* (*The 88 Standards* plus art and other info in *HyperCard 2.0* for Macintosh computer). (\$36.00. Price includes subscriptions to *RockHEAD* and *The Node*.)
- *Polyfidelity* (256-page book). (\$10.00)
- *RockHEAD* (music/psychology/lifestyles newspaper) and *The Node* (computers/futurology/business philosophy newspaper). (Sample copies free; subscriptions \$9/yr. each. Both quarterly publications feature *Far Out West* comix by Even Eve.)
- *Blueprint for Heaven on Earth* (Kerista Commune handbook, circa 1988). (Free)
- *History of Kerista* (pamphlet with Allen Ginsberg's views on Kerista, circa 1964). (\$5.00)

Note: Price of all books and pamphlets include tax & postage.

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